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SUBJECT: ADVISOR SAYS GNP CANDIDATE LEE LACKS CLEAR FOREIGN  
POLICY VISION

Classified By: A/POL Brian Mcfeeters. Reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Former Foreign Minister Yoo Chong-ha, a senior advisor to Lee Myung-bak, told poloffs on September 26 that Lee's lack of overall foreign policy vision worried him. Since Lee did not have a fixed idea about how Korea should relate to its neighbors, Lee was flexible and open to ideas. However, one idea Lee held firm was that the U.S.-ROK alliance was like "the main pillar for the house" and the relationship with the U.S. was not a simple alliance but critical for Korea's survival. Continuing the metaphor, Yoo said Korea's relationships with China, Japan and others, was like the "color of the house or the shape of the front gate" -- these could be changed at any time. Also, Lee looked at foreign policy in business terms -- the U.S. was the ROK's main partner and the other relationships were like peripheral business arrangements. While Yoo said he continued to attempt to persuade Lee to look more closely at foreign policy issues, Lee continued to insist that his focus should be on domestic issues that could help win the December 19 election. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Yoo Chong-ha, Foreign Minister at the end of the Kim Young-sam administration (1996-1998), told poloffs that he had an opportunity to advise GNP Candidate Lee Myung-bak on a wide range of foreign policy issues since Lee did not have any previous expertise. Many in and out of Lee's camp note that Yoo has considerable influence over Lee and most pundits also note that Lee has no previous expertise on diplomacy or any vision on foreign policy.

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NORTH KOREA  
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¶3. (C) Lee was against Roh holding the planned October 2-4 North-South summit, but was hesitant to speak out against the summit since most Koreans supported dialog with the North. Lee was likely instead to issue a public statement ahead of the summit addressing his concerns about the summit in very general terms. Lee would focus on criticizing any project Roh proposed that was long-term. Roh should not make pledges that the next president had to carry out but Lee understood that holding a summit was fully in his prerogative as president.

¶4. (C) Yoo said the DPRK must denuclearize -- this would be Lee's most important goal regarding North Korea. He said

Lee, if elected, would closely tie any economic assistance -- except carefully considered humanitarian aid -- to dismantlement steps. South Korea should be very clear about these linkages and stand by them; only then would the DPRK fully denuclearize.

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JAPAN AND CHINA  
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15. (C) Yoo, who traveled to Beijing September 27 to lay the groundwork for a possible trip by Lee to China, said that Lee had no overarching strategic vision for foreign policy that would dictate how Seoul relates to its neighbors. Relations with Japan and China, referred to by Yoo as "peripheral partnerships," were fungible, as opposed to relations with the U.S. Yoo commented that conservatives in Tokyo maintained a hard-line towards the North that many conservative Koreans wished they could emulate. He noted nationalism as a major political force in Japan made it difficult for closer ties with Seoul.

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OVERSEAS TRAVEL  
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16. (C) Yoo said that in past elections, a trip to the U.S. or China was de rigueur and won votes for the candidate. However, if the trip did not allow Lee to "look presidential" by meeting with the President of the country, Yoo did not see any particular reason for overseas travel ahead of the election.

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EDUCATION  
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17. (C) Foreign Minister at the end of Kim Young-sam's presidency, Yoo is the senior diplomat among the conservatives and as such has been charged with steering Lee's overall foreign policy. Yoo said he hoped to get Lee to focus in detail on complicated foreign policy issues before the December election but so far, had been unsuccessful. Yoo said his experience told him that if a detailed foreign policy vision was not developed ahead of time, it could lead to slip-ups at the beginning of the administration.

Bio note: Yoo (72) was a professor at Sogang University from 1998-2004. In 2004, he started his own business, which failed. Yoo is currently chairman of CyberMBA, an online MBA and corporate retraining company. Yoo's posts as a career diplomat included: 1959: joined MOFAT, 1978: DG for American Affairs, 1992: Ambassador to the UN, 1994-1996: National Security Advisor, 1996-1998: Foreign Minister, 1999: Visiting Professor at Claremont McKenna College. Born in Andong in 1936, he graduated from Seoul National in 1959. As President of the Daegu Athletic Championship Bidding Committee, he led a successful bid for Daegu to host the World Championships of Athletics in 2011.

STANTON